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Ritual exchange at the Kashmir border

Thousands of Indians and Pakistanis have gathered at the Kashmir border to celebrate an annual festival at a holy shrine.

The shrine, located on the Indian side of the border, is revered by people of all faiths, who believe it has miraculous healing powers.

The festival, held in June each year, venerates a mystic, Baba Daleep Singh Manhas, who lived in the remote border village of Chamliyal, nearly three centuries ago.

Local residents say a paste made from the soil by the shrine and water from a nearby well can cure skin problems.

**Tradition**

Pakistani devotees sang and danced at the border, as border guards from both sides stood by.

The shrine was traditionally visited by people from both sides of the border every year.

However, the visits stopped after the war between India and Pakistan in 1965.

After that, thousands of Pakistanis began gathering at the border and exchanging religious offerings with the Indians - but without

“ We are carrying forward an old tradition ”

Ashok Sethi Indian border police

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crossing over.

In what has now become a ritual, Indian border guards present truckloads of "holy paste" to their Pakistani counterparts at the border.

In return, they are given ritual shawls embroidered with Koranic verses.

"We are carrying forward an old tradition," said Ashok Sethi of India's Border Security Force.



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### **Dwindling numbers**

Over the past 10 years, the number of Pakistani devotees has declined considerably, due to the growing tension between the two countries.

The ritual did not take place at all last year, because of the Kargil conflict between the two countries.

But Indian border guards say this year's gathering is the largest since 1989.

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